(b) if so, the names of the items whose prices have increased in the recent past and availability of which is also scarce; and

(c) the steps taken to contain the prices of those items and to make them available to the public without difficulty ?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI A. K. ANTONY) : (a) and (b) The monitoring of prices, availability of selected essential commodities and the steps to be taken for augmenting their availability through increasing indigenous production and also resorting to imports is an on-going activity. At present, the supply position of essential commodities like rice, wheat, tea, sugar, edible oils and coarse grains etc. is comfortable . Due to the existing gap between demand and supply, the import of sugar, selected edible oils, pulses and cotton has been placed under Open General Licence (OGL), with a view to increasing their domestic availability and to also keeping their prices under check.

(c) The Government has given highest priority for controlling the rise in prices within reasonable limits. The Inter-Ministerial Coordination Committee on Monitoring of Prices reviews the price scenario and advises the concerned authorities to take appropriate and timely action. Efforts are being made to increase the productionl Commodities which are in short supply are being imported to supplement their easy availability in the market. Imports of sugar, palmolein and cotto n have been placed under Open General Licence (OGL). Public Distribution System is being strengthened and streamlined so that its banefits reach even in the inaccessible areas. State Governments/U.T. Administrations are advised from time to time to take stringent action against hoarders, black-marketeers and such anti- social elements under the Essential Commodities Act and simlar other legislations.

Ban on export of Onions

704. PROF. VIJAY KUMAR MALHOTRA : Will the Minister of CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government had taken decision to ban the export of onions sometime back ;

(b) whether the ban was withdrawn after sometime;

(c) if so, the reasons for banning the export and then lifting the same; and

(d) the Prices at which the onion has been selling in the country in the last 12 months, month-wise and how does the same compare with the prices during the preceding year ?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI A. K. ANTONY) : (a) and (b) The expts of onions from the country were temporarily suspended for a brief period with effect from 22-10-1994.

(c) The exports of onions were temporarily suspended so as to improve the domestic availability of onions and the suspension was revoked immediately after the supply position of onions had improved.

(d) A comperative statement indicting the retail prices of onions at selected centres on a monthwise basis is in the Annexure [*See* Appendix 172, Annexure No. 19].